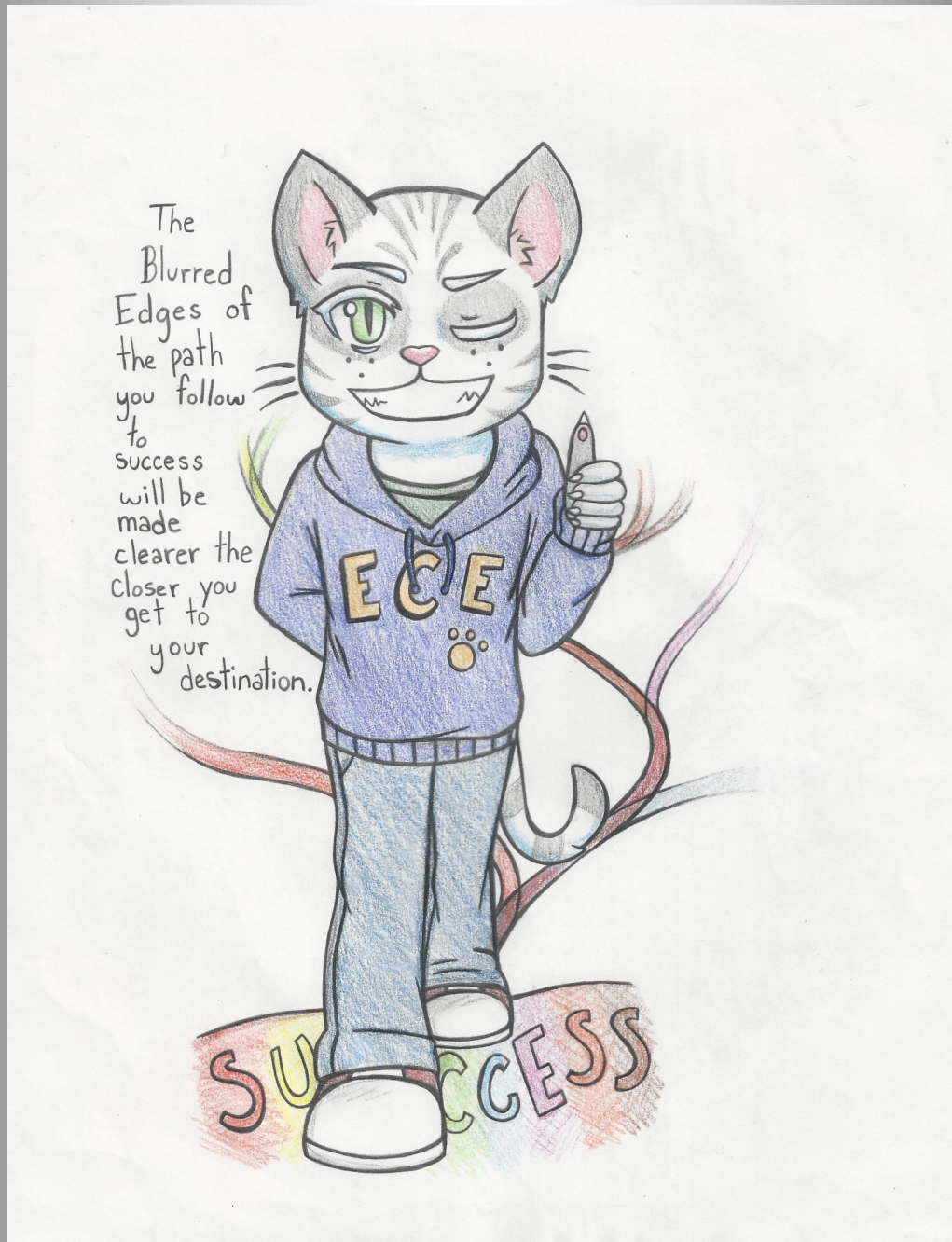


Early College EAST High School



Blurred Edges

Volume 2

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Title: Watercolor Tiger

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Art Submissions

1. Blurred Edges (drawing) by Jordyn LaRocca	cover
2. Watercolor Tiger (watercolor) by Miranda Flori	2
3. Charade (drawing) by Claudia Yllanes	5
4. Blood Rising (drawing) by Jordyn LaRocca	6
5. Arctic Skimmer (drawing) by Claudia Yllanes	9
6. Odoru (digital art) by Jordyn LaRocca	12
7. Dark Charade (drawing) by Claudia Yllanes	16
8. (drawing) by Samantha Barrows	17
9. Ink Dreams (drawing) by Miranda Flori	22
10. Poppy (painting) by Miranda Flori	23
11. Vengeance (drawing) by Miranda Flori	24
12. Wise Mr. Cat (digital art) by Jordyn LaRocca	24
13. Two Roads (drawing) by Jordyn LaRocca	25
14. Isis Kiss (digital art) by Jordyn LaRocca	25
15. I Can't Fly (painting) by Miranda Flori	26
16. New Year's Promise (drawing) by Jordyn LaRocca	27
17. Trickster Xanthe (digital art) by Samantha Barrows	27
18. (drawing) by Jordyn LaRocca	31
19. (photo) by Ashley Mullikin	34
20. (photo) by Ashley Mullikin	36

Literary Submissions

1. What's Inside by Laramie Keeler	5
2. Dragon's Nest by Marlena Evans	6
3. Finding Wings: Prologue by Claudia Yllanes	7
4. Miranda's Story by Hannah Barclay	12
5. Wasteland by Angel Yllanes	13
6. Utah by Ashley Creech	17
7. Fire Bug by Angel Yllanes	18
8. Navy Dream by Milo Alvarez	22
9. Where Does Perfection Lie? by Claudia Yllanes	23
10. Raise your Hand by Jordyn LaRocca	28
11. Why You Keep the Old, Ragged Towels by Jordyn LaRocca	29
12. A New Reality: Chapter 1 by Matthew Beese	32
13. Where Does Perfection Lie? by Unkiwn	34
14. A New Reality: Chapter 2 by Matthew Beese	35

Navy Dream

Milo Alvarez

I was lying in bed, getting sleepier and sleepier. I put in my earbuds and closed my eyes. I started to doze. A few minutes later I woke but in a dream. I was standing before a massive destroyer ship. I was shocked because I didn't know where I was. I looked around and ran around trying to find out where I was. I asked people where I was and they kept saying I was in Norfolk, Virginia. At that point I realized something: I was in the navy ship yard. I looked down at myself and I was wearing a blue camo outfit same as anyone else on the other ships and docks. I walked back to the ship that I woke up in front of and went aboard it. I walked around and around. I found a door with my name on it and went in. It had a captain's uniform and personal belongings. I went up to the bridge and found people looking at different types of radars and maps. Some people had phones and were talking in to them. One person told me I had a call waiting for me. I picked it up and knew who it was because I recognized the voice, it was Mr. Wiggs. He told me that the schools were going over naval history and how the weapons and ships have changed over time. He asked if the staff and students could come up to Norfolk for two weeks. I agreed to let them come. I planned everything with the teachers, the activities, the time to eat, clearance to get on the base, rooms, showers, where the students could and could not go, and safety hazards. Mr. Wiggs said that they would be arriving in a few days. I got a phone call from the commander saying that this fleet would be leaving on deployment in a week. Three days later I got call that two buses are at the front gate asking for me. I jogged to the front gate and gave the gate master my pass to let them through. When I hopped on the bus everyone start to smile and scream because I've been gone for so long. I hopped on the front bus and told the bus driver which way to go. We eventually arrived on the shipyard and sailors helped the drivers unload the baggage. The teachers let the students off to stretch their legs. I led one group up into the destroyer. The other did an activity. I showed the first group around the ship like the bridge, the cafeteria, the rooms, and the locker room. I gave the teachers maps and told them they can go anywhere. I went outside to get the other group and did the same just like the first group. A week later while everyone was sleeping except for a few sailors and myself. I told them it was time to deploy and one person pushed a button that raised the anchors. We left the docks and set our course to Japan. When the students and teachers woke up they weren't all that happy. I assured them that we would be fine. After a few weeks we arrived in Japan. We all went to sleep that night except for a few sailors taking night shifts. The alarm went off and everyone hopped out of bed and raced around frantically. Sailors grabbed rifles to defend our ship. I was fighting one pirate when another came behind and shot me in my back. It went all the way through to my chest. I froze and fell to the metal floor with a thud. I clutched my chest in pain trying to breathe. I heard the alarms go off and an all clear. I grew sleepy and started to close my eyes. Before I closed them I looked over and saw a pool of blood and realized that it was my own blood. I heard footsteps and yelling but closed my eyes. I felt someone shake me but I ignored it for I couldn't open my eyes, I couldn't move. I was too weak. I heard a beeping noise and opened my eyes and looked over it was a monitor that was monitoring my heart beat. I moved my arms but they were too stiff. I tried the same with my legs but got the same result. I looked over and saw a few students and teachers with tears rolling down their faces. I moved to sit up but a doctor told me that I needed to lay down for a while longer. I felt pain in my chest and remembered what had happened. I looked around and could tell we were still on the ship. Weeks later I recovered and we all went home.

What's Inside

Laramie Keeler

Eyes.
Your eyes.
They say so much.
I can see all the pain,
all of the hurt,
all of the faked smiles,
all the mistakes.
They read like a book.
But in those eyes of yours,
I see a beautiful soul,
trapped by the past,
clinging to a little sliver of hope,
dying to get out.
I'm here to save you,
and that little heart of yours.
Because you're too young,
and have too much potential
to be so sad and to feel so hopeless.
Leave all of the bad behind
and give life a chance
because I'll be here to help you,
and pick you up when you're down.
I won't leave you, like the rest.
Because it'd kill be to see the same
pain,
and sorrow in your eyes
like I saw when we met.

Charade

Claudia Yllanes



Dragon's Nest

Marlena Evans

Prologue

The dragons were known for there magic. It's what made them strong and powerful allies in wars. They were seen wearing heavy armor flying over villages. The people loved seeing them. The Dark Ages were another matter. A high ranking officer, desperate for the death and chaos to stop, hated the dragons. He thought of them as a danger to the people. Out of hatred, he led an army whose mission was to kill off every last one of them. The dragons were slaughtered in large numbers. One thing that the officer did not expect:

The few remaining dragons, less than twenty left, used their magic to turn into humans.

Their descendants walk among us. They are our friends and maybe even our family. Even though the transformation was permanent, they can still use their magic. Most of them aren't aware of their lineage. Still, they instinctively want to get rid of the people who do nothing but try to harm the human race...

Blood Rising

Jordyn LaRocca



Finding Wings: Prologue

Claudia Yllanes

As dawn rose over the eastern horizon, the crumbling stone of an abandoned colosseum threw a stark shadow upon the sand-laden floor. Tattered flags clung to rusted poles and hung lifelessly in the still air. All was silent but for the occasional chattering that sprung from the small families of terraten. The small mammals were a foot tall at the shoulder with rock-like tan skin, blunted oblong heads, and thick corded tails which could inflict far more damage than their blunt teeth. The creatures dove in and out of the building's floor, making use of the tunnels that had been built and used by their ancestors in the years since the colosseum's untimely abandonment.

Suddenly, the joyful chattering was broken by a warbling alarm cry, a note that fell high and low before rising back and then higher still. Then it tapered off and the terraten were gone, deep within their tunnels and leaving the colosseum quiet as a grave.

It wasn't long until the silence was replaced with muted rushes of air, and a mongrel dragon of no particular lineage dug its claws deeply into the highest outcropping of rocks as it landed. Wide, leathery wings fluttered slightly before folding against the dragon's sides, and honey toned eyes surveyed the floor of the colosseum. However, the eyes soon seeped into a dark gray and the dragon's scales clattered together softly when nothing was to be found. Its head drooped low and a guttural croon rolled across the colosseum floor. There was no reply, and the great beast turned, prepared to leave.

Then its muscles tensed, and it sniffed the air, irises churning with gray and traces of bright orange. The dragon's ears swiveled atop its head, trying to pinpoint a sound barely perceptible. Then orange flooded its eyes and it launched itself into the sky with an angry screech.

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The ears of a dragon much farther away pricked as they picked up the distant echoes of the screech. Her body was largely scaled, as was typical, but her mantle, wings, spinal ridge, and tail tip were covered in bright red feathers. Her scales in contrast ran a gradient from navy blue to midnight, the only exception being the rings of white that adorned her eyeridge and front legs. The circles were thin, and overlapped repeatedly. The effect was startling against the darker blue.

She did not fly alone. A web of dark leather straps and iron chains were looped across her shoulders and broad back, stretching and turning with each beat of her wings. In the center of it all sat a nineteen year old human. He wore a white tunic under a thick leather jacket, and he covered his legs with loose gray pants and knee-high boots. His skin was tan- not to mention a bit red from a developing windburn- and his eyes were light blue and cheerful. A pair of aviator goggles rested snugly in a nest of short blonde hair.

A gloved hand rested on the dragon's shoulder, and he felt the tightening of her muscles as she glanced around. "Got somethin', Robin?" His voice was raspy, and came out with a slight Avernian drawl.

The dragon rumbled deep in her chest, an undertone of Draven rasp colouring her words. "It sounds like a rogue, but I'm not sure yet."

The teen frowned, and his voice came out tighter than normal, "Where is it?"

Robin slowed her pace and tilted her head, eyes a light lavender and furrowed in worry. "Al?" When he didn't answer- didn't seem to register that she had spoken at all- Robin's voice became firm rather than curious, and her eyes took on a steely colour. "Alfred. Tell me what's wrong."

The blonde blinked rapidly, startled, then shook his head. "Sorry, it's around time for the Kirin Hatch-

ing.”

Robin raised an eye ridge, her eyes changing to a sunny yellow as she teased, “You do know that’s on the other side of the Vorkiume Pass, don’t you?”

“...Oh,”

Robin chuckled and straightened out before complying with his original request, “The sound came from around 40 kilometers southeast of here.” Alfred did the calculations in his head for a moment, “So- it’s somewhere near the old colosseum...” He reached down a hand and unclipped his headset, setting it around his ears and fiddling with the dials until he heard light breathing. With a sly smile, Al spoke loudly, “Oi, Feli! You awake over there?”

A yelp made its way over the headset as the person on the other headset scrambled wildly. A few seconds later a voice, with a barely there Dorical accent, spoke, “Alfred! Don’t scare me like that, I nearly fell off of Bambino!”

Alfred laughed, unconcerned. All aviators wore the harness when they were airborne, so there was never any chance of that. “Hey, are you and Bambino near the old colosseum?”

The headset went quiet as Feliciano and Bambino spoke with each other, “Ve~ yes. We’re headed that way right now, Bambino said he heard a rogue.”

Alfred nodded, “Good, tell me once you get there, and give a status report.”

Feliciano hummed a happy affirmation, “Aye-aye, captain.”

The line went dead, and Robin turned to Alfred with bright red eyes. “Should we speed up, Alfie? I could get there in fifteen minutes if-”

Alfred laughed at her enthusiasm, “Slow down there, Ro. Feli and ‘bino can hold their own, and they’ll drive the rogue right to us.”

Robin’s ears drooped slightly, but she kept a steady pace. Within seconds, Feliciano was back on the headset. “Okay, we’ve found her. She’s too big for us to take on alone though, so we’re driving her your way. Would you set off a flare?”

Alfred grasped the gun on his belt, “Sure thing,” he grabbed a flare bulb and set it in, aiming up and a bit to the right. With a tug of his finger, the flare was sent rocketing into the sky, where it burst red and bright.

“Thanks Alfred, give us five minutes.” Alfred took off the headset and re-clipped it, holstering the gun as well.

“You got all that, Ro?”

The dragon nodded and kept flying, the feathers on her mantle and along her spine raising with anticipation. The two flew in agitated silence for a couple minutes, alert and eager, until they spotted a ragged cloud much lower than the rest. As they approached, they spotted a long, leathery, wing-tip breach the edge of the cloud, barely missing it in spite of knowing where to look. With an eager keen from the dragon and a whoop of joy from the teen, the duo burst forward with a bloodthirsty fervor.

Robin’s maw opened wide and a challenging, bird-like, roar rumbled towards the cloud. With an answering shriek, a grey dragon burst out of the cloud, trailing streaks of vapor from small nodules along its back. As the dragon, a third the size of Robin in bulk but nearly an equal in wingspan, pulled nearer, a ring of vapor rose from around its face in greeting, and Robin raised her frill in return. The two pulled alongside each other and circled the large cloud, allowing Alfred a good look at the person atop the adjacent dragon’s back.



Arctic Skimmer

Claudia Yllanes

The red-headed eighteen year old waved a gloved hand jovially to Alfred, sporting a long-sleeved cream shirt under a black leather vest and a headset resting around his neck. Unlike Alfred, the other rider wore his goggles over his eyes, and the metal pieces shone brightly.

"Ve~ glad you could make it, Alfred!" He called out.

"Glad to be here, Feli." Alfred replied, turning to the cloud, "How big is she?"

Feliciano tilted his head as he tried to recall the details, "About the size of a well-fed third class, and she has a speed-type body build, but she's no match for Bambino," At this, the Doricean leaned forward and patted the fine scales of his partner's neck, smiling broadly. "Ve~ and her conformity is absolutely beauti-"

"Thanks Feli, that's all we'll be needing!" Alfred cut in, to the annoyance of his friend. "You and Bambino keep an eye out, 'kay?"

Feliciano's face quickly changed from a short frown to a cheery nod as he and Bambino pulled away. Without a second more, Robin gave a powerful push from her wings and arrowed into the cloud. Alfred pulled down his goggles and looked around, adjusting the lenses until he could see more properly. A smudge of murky red to the far right caught his eye, growing rapidly, and before he could shout out, a dragon barreled out of the mist and into Robin's side.

With a roar, the two dragons began to fight, clawing and snapping at each other. Blood immediately began to spray, bright and red, into the air. Robin, being larger, had the upperhand in strength, but the rogue was far more agile, and managed to score more- though shallower- wounds. Alfred had his gun out now, taking any shot he could reasonably get at the attacking dragon, and was reloading when Robin grabbed a hold of the rogue's arms.

A long, barbed, tail swung over Robin's back, managing to nick Alfred in the shoulder. With a grunt, he winced and continued loading. The rogue's head was in range now, and if he could just get off a shot it would probably leave. The russet head turned to him then, as if reading his thoughts. Alfred got a good look at the bright red of her irises and shuddered. He raised the gun, now slightly unsteady in a one-handed grip, and aimed. But the dragon's eyes changed, widening and lightening into a pale yellow as it stopped struggling. Alfred paused and lowered his gun, perplexed, and raised his goggles to make sure he was seeing correctly.

Immediately, the dragon began crooning, humming and growling in Dravokich. Alfred frowned uncomprehendingly, but Robin slowly ceased her fighting. The rogue paused, as if waiting for an answer, but Alfred hadn't heard a question and remained silent. With a high keen, the dragon's eyes leached of colour until they were a light grey, and she began speaking rapidly, swinging her head side to side as her wailing got louder. Robin released her and winged backwards, giving the wailing dragon a long look before speaking, also in Dravokich. Alfred remained shell-shocked and stared, not responding when the headset on his belt began buzzing with a certain Doricean's questions. Eventually, the line went silent with a barely audible, "We're on our way."

The two dragons carried on their conversation, Robin sounding soothing but firm and the rogue swinging her head even more fervently than before, keening high and long. Then Bambino and Feliciano flew in, looking ready to fight, until they noticed the odd situation. Feli steered Bambino up next to Robin and shouted, snapping Alfred out of his stupor.

"Al! What's going on?"

Alfred whipped around at the sound, "I-I'm not sure, Feli. Her eyes changed in the middle of the fight."

Feliciano frowned, "Robin's?"

Alfred shook his head, "The rogue's. She looked at me and then-"

A rise in the volume of the dragon's conversation, which Bambino had by then joined, drew the attention of the two humans. The rogue was now looking at Feliciano, keening and clicking desperately. "She started doing that," Alfred finished, his voice unsteady.

Feliciano shrank back slightly, "Do you understand anything she's saying?"

Alfred shook his head, "No, I opted out of the language class, it didn't seem important since all the dragons speak human, y'know?"

With a breathless laugh, Feliciano nodded, and the two fell into a weighty silence as the dragons continued talking- although at this point it seemed more like an argument, with every party subtly widening the distance between them. Bambino seemed the most eager to leave, the ridges on his back sending mist generously into the air.

After what seemed like an eternity, the rogue keened one last time and turned tail, flying away before simply blinking out of existence.

"Whoa! Where'd she go?" Alfred asked, taken aback.

"Don't worry about it, Al." Robin rumbled, sounding exhausted. "She's just going home."

For a moment, it seemed like Alfred would protest. Instead, he slumped forward and nodded, patting Robin's side. "Alright. We should be heading back too, I guess." Robin nodded and turned, flying west.

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Feliciano and Bambino were already a few kilometers ahead of the two, and gaining ground. The small dragon was flying much quicker than his normal cruising pace, and Feliciano- who on a normal day would have enjoyed the flight- was worried. "Ve~ what's wrong 'Bino?"

The dragon merely grunted, "It was that rogue." His voice had a low whistling sound, less raspy than most dragonkin's. "She had very- interesting claims."

Feliciano's brows creased, "What do you mean?"

Bambino stayed silent for quite a while, and Feliciano began to grow agitated. Just when the Doricean opened his mouth to tell the dragon that he wasn't eight anymore, that they were partners and needed to share these things, the dragon spoke lowly.

"She said that she- she and her colony-... They lost something."

Feliciano blinked, forgetting his anger. "I don't understand, Bambino."

The dragon took a deep breath and sighed, "She said they had lost many things actually, and when she said lost, she meant that they were stolen." Bambino paused again, searching for the right words, "She said that humans came on Ramfiers night and stole eggs, hatchlings, and- three small humans." He craned his neck around to look at his partner, "She seems to think that you and Alfred were two of those humans."

Feliciano felt a shock run up his spine, "B-but Alfred and I- we were never anywhere but the Outpost! We couldn't possibly-"

Bambino's eyes turned a soft blue and he slowed down, crooning gently, "I know, Feli, I know. That's what Robin and I were trying to tell her. She just made a mistake, that's all."

Feliciano nodded and took a shaky breath, resting a hand on Bambino's neck. "I wonder who they lost..." Their expressions turned grave and the two rode in contemplative silence for the rest of the flight.

Miranda's Story

Hannah Barclay

Miranda Winchester was sitting in her garage doing her favorite thing. Playing the drums. It was the middle of Summer in Lawrence, Kansas so she had about 50 fans surrounding her immense drum kit and her self. Plus she had the two garage doors open allowing the cool summer breeze to mix in with all the fans. She often didn't play with the doors open but it was so blasted hot that she would've died of a heat stroke if she didn't. She was playing her favorite song by her favorite band. Nightmare by Avenged Sevenfold.

She was just about to finish the song when her dad pulled up in his original 1967 Chevy Impala. "Hey dad." Miranda said taking off her headphones.

"Hey bud." Sam Winchester said in return walking past her and ruffled her already messed up hair.

Sam was a good father to Miranda. After her mother died a few years ago, it was difficult for the both of them. But last year Sam was at work at the family business and beautiful blonde girl walked through the doors. Her name was Jessica. Miranda really liked Jessica but it was still difficult having to get used to her in the house other than her mom.

"Dad" Miranda asked getting up from her chair.

"Yeees." Sam asked turning around on his heels.

"What's for dinner?"

"Umm... Do tacos sound good?"

"Exceptionally!"



As the two went inside they are greeted by the wondrous smell of tacos.

Odoru

Jordyn LaRocca

Wasteland

Angel Yllanes

I took comfort in the hiss of the spray paint, one of the few constant things in my rather hectic life. I took a step back and admired my tag sprawled across the crumbling brick wall. I tucked the spray can into my belt, which was specially modified to hold my weapons, spray cans, etc. Satisfied that the tag was perfect, I turned and started to make my way back to camp.

It had been about ten years since humanity fell. From what I could glean from newspapers and magazines, the world was suddenly hit by a powerful new infection that seemed to come from pollution. It mutated people until they almost didn't look humans turning their minds back to their basic instincts.

I strolled through the wrecked and overgrown streets of New York*, passing through piles of debris and ducking under fallen light posts. I froze as I heard a rustle in some bushes and slowly reached a hand towards my back. I slid an already strung bow off of my shoulder and aimed it carefully towards the noise, silently nocking an arrow and drawing the string back. I crept forward slowly, and relaxed as a rabbit scampered out of the leaves.

I sighed in relief and released the tension on the bowstring, turned back to the path, and started to run.

As I turned a corner, I spotted the crumbling skyscraper that I used as my camp and stopped. I scanned my surroundings to make sure that there were no mutants lurking in the shadows and turned to my right. I made sure to stay on the outskirts of the expanse of openness that marked the border of my camp, bypassing the various traps and alarms that I had set there. Reaching the door, I pushed it open.

"Natalie!" A voice called, followed by the sounds of scampering. I turned towards the stairwell and caught the bundle of fur that launched itself at me.

"Hey Katie! Anything happen while I was out?" I placed the fur ball down on the floor and the rather excited black labrador started to scamper around in circles.

"Not really. Some of the mutated tried to cross the traps, but they weren't able to pass." The dog wagged her tail and sat on the floor before stopping and concentrating. In a blur of colors, she turned into a teenage girl clothed in black, a tail and dog ears indicating her previous form.

"I'm going to need to reset those traps," I muttered. I walked up the stairwell, Katie close behind, and stopped in the room I used as a living room of sorts. I shrugged off my jacket and hung it on the coat rack near the door.

"What about you? Did anything happen while you were out?" Katie asked, already perched on the ragged couch that was shoved into a corner.

"Not anything terribly interesting. I just gathered some stuff." I plopped myself next to her on the couch, burrowing a bit into the cushions.

"Like what?" Katie chirped, my bag already in her hands. I reached over and took it back.

"Just some supplies." I unzipped the bag and started to take out the mentioned supplies.

"Why do you go out to find stuff if we have everything we need here? I mean, we have food, shelter, weapons, and traps to make sure the mutants don't get in." She looked at me with her head cocked to the side.

"Well, I like to be prepared. If the mutants figure out how to get past the traps, I'd like to know the surrounding area so we can make a quick getaway. I also leave little pockets of supplies out in the city for the same reason." I shoot a quick grin at Katie, "Plus, I just really like exploring." I pause, hearing the pained yelp of a mutant getting hit by my traps.

"I guess so. Do you think you could take me along with you next time?"

"I thought you didn't want to go out?"

"I do want to! I just don't like it when you go alone. Something could happen to you and I wouldn't know." I sat mulling this over. Finally I lifted my head and gave my answer.

"I will on one condition."

"What?"

"You have to cook dinner tonight."

I sat in my bed, trying to think of the safest route to travel with Kaite. It would be her first time out since I brought her here. It was a couple of months ago that I found her. I was on one of my usual routes.

I crept through the underbrush, a sword held at the ready. I peered through the wall of vines that hid my view of the street. I had stumbled across the outskirts of a mutant camp a couple blocks back, but was able to get away undetected. I stayed because I thought I saw something interesting. The mutants were all gathered around an object in the center of their camp. Curious, I stayed to try to get a better look. I pushed some of the vines out of my line of sight and looked at the middle of the camp.

I spotted what looked like a bundle of fur being held in a cage in the middle of the camp. A large number of the mutants were crowded around the cage and staring at the object within. The mutants were part of the variation that I called Shooters. They used their bones for offense, able to regenerate them at an astonishing rate and shoot them out of their arms. They used their ribs for close combat, but were slow and clumsy, their arms hanging to the ground. They walked like apes, and weren't much smarter.

I crept back into the wall of vines to try to find a better vantage point and stepped over the broken glass of a door. I walked up a flight of stairs and appeared on the roof. I walked over to a small pile of rubble and shifted some rocks out of the way, revealing a hunting rifle wrapped in some rags. I carefully unwrapped the gun and checked it for any signs of defects and, seeing none, I reached farther into the pile of rock and pulled out a box filled with bullets.

Loading the bullets into a magazine, I peered over the edge of the small wall bordering the roof to make sure the Shooters were still crowded around the thing. Looking closer, I realized that it was a girl. I could have sworn it was an animal earlier. Oh well. All the more reason to help the poor thing. I loaded the magazine with a click and peered down the sights, aiming at the mutant nearest the cage. Breathing slowly out of my mouth, I fired.

The bullet blew a piece of the Shooter's head off and it went down. The other mutants immediately scattered and looked for cover, a couple of them trying to grab the cage. I fired off two more shots, the bullets finding homes in their brains. The other mutants, over their initial shock, started to shoot at me. I ducked as a jagged piece of bone flew over the wall, zipping over my head. I popped my head over and took a few potshots at the remaining Shooters.

I spotted a few heading towards the building I was hiding in and started to shoot at them, but was forced to take cover as the other mutants started cover fire. I abandoned the gun and took out my sword, taking care that I stood out of the range of the other Shooters. I heard their first blundering steps coming up to the roof and, as the first one popped its head up, I separated its head from its neck. The others, slightly smarter, started shooting up the stairwell to keep me back. I blocked a few shards with my blade and pulled a throwing knife from its belt and threw it at the mutants. The first knife got lodged in one's forehead while one of its companions found a home in another Shooter's eye. The last Shooter decided on a tactical retreat that involved tumbling down the stairs and breaking its neck.

I grabbed the rifle again and looked back to find the cage. Seeing that two more Shooters were trying

to drag the cage with them, their companions already gone, I shot both and scanned the area to make sure no more mutants were around.

I placed the rifle back in the rubble pile along with the box of bullets, making a mental note to refill the box, and, after retrieving my knives, started back down the stairs. I quickly crossed the cleared area to the cage, seeing that the girl was intact and alive, but badly shaken.

"Hey." I say softly, not wanting to scare her further. "Are you okay? Any injuries?" The girl, keeping her head down, shook her head and I saw that she was only fifteen or sixteen. I see something move behind her and froze. A tail was shaking behind her and, looking at her closer, I saw that she had a pair of floppy black ears. Her eyes widened when she realized what I was looking at, and she started to shy away.

"Hey. No. It's okay. I won't hurt you," I crooned. I carefully took out my sword and set it on the floor, keeping eye contact with the girl. I reached a hand to my side and unbuckled my throwing knife belt, letting it fall to the floor. She flinched a bit at the sound it made, but relaxed when she noticed that I could not reach them. I inspected the cage and found that the door was fastened by a simple sliding lock.

"I'm going to open the door. Okay?" Seeing the small nod I went ahead and opened the door. As the door opened the girl shied away once again, but also lifted her head, her eyes full of fear and hope.

"Who... are you?" The girl croaked, her voice sounding dry.

"My name's Natalie." I took off my pack and rummaged around inside, coming up with a canteen filled with water. "Here drink this." She slowly came out of the cage, expecting something to happen, but when nothing did, she grabbed the water and sat down a couple feet away from the cage.

"Thanks." She grabbed the bottle, sniffed the water warily, and started to drink. I got up as she quenched her thirst and decided to inspect the cage, crouching down in front of it..

The bars were made by crudely lashing bits and pieces of stuff together, a piece of sheet metal comprised the top and bottom of the cage.

"Um... Excuse me?" I heard the girl's voice behind me. I turned, seeing that she finished the water. "Why did you save me?"

"Well it's not like I can leave someone to those freaks, now can I?" I say, smiling. I get up from the crouching position I had taken and dusted off my pants.

"I guess." She handed back the canteen, giving me a grateful look. I smile at her again.

"Welp. I should head out now. The mutants are probably going to come back soon." I start to walk away, but stopped once I heard a shout.

"Wait!" I turn curious and saw the girl, now standing up.

"Yes?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"C-can I come with you?" She said, rubbing her arm nervously.

"Don't you have somewhere to go back to?"

"I... don't think so."

"You don't think so?"

"Yeah... I just woke up a couple days ago. All I know is my name."

"And what's that?"

"Katie."

That was the first time I had talked with another fully sentient being in over five years. It was rather refreshing. She soon fully warmed up to me and started to help around the house. I also soon found out that she could turn into a black lab at will.

I was happy that I had found someone that I can talk to, it was getting rather lonely in my 'tower of

solitude'. I was actually debating on whether or not to go on a suicide run into the middle of a mutant camp. I looked over to the other bed in the room and, satisfied that Katie was safe, drifted off to sleep.

**Just to clarify: New York is already overgrown and basically a jungle in about ten years because of the effects of the chemicals that mutated or killed people, the chemicals making the plants grow fast and new species of flora and fauna to pop up.*

Dark Charade

Claudia Yllanes



Utah

Ashley Creech

Biography about Evelyn Escobar
That she had wished on a shooting star
That she would one day be with Wilson Stuart
Who almost got hit by a car
Well, what a star

Wilson Stuart is on his mission
To reach every nation
Sharing the news of church
Reaching every home by walk, car ride, Airport, and Train station
He is out on every search

Wilson came over for dinner after his mission
After coming back from the train station
Evelyn admires his speech testimony
The way he speaks his words in such creation
Oh did I mention Wilson likes Macarroni

Evelyn is telling her brother Diego about Wilson now
They share code names for Wilson like "cow"
Also another nickname for Stuart is pork chop
Every time she tries to talk to Wilson, she gets scared and leaves
him and says "Chow"
At first when she tried to talk to him, she felt like falling off a cliff
top

Evelyn hopes to see him in Utah
She thinks he is the cutest and sweetest guy she had ever saw
She is going to move there someday
They are going to be a cute couple someday, AWWW
Soon she waits day by day
To be with him in Utah

Samantha Barrows



Fire Bug

Angel Yllanes

Relentless is the word I would call my pursuer. It kept banging on the door of the closet, in which I hid, its horrible rattling breath torturing my ears. I only caught a glimpse of it before I ran. A bright red rubber suit and a gas mask pulled over its head, standing in the burned ruins of my house. It turned its blank eyes in my direction and I ran, fear powering my mad dash from the monster. That was a month ago, and here I am, still running.

I gasped as the blade of a fire ax pierced the flimsy wooden door. I scanned the room for an exit, and was rewarded by a small window. It was out of my reach, but I tugged a ruined couch under it and I pulled myself up. A small pane of glass stopped me, but I broke it with a small knife I had acquired for my defense. It shattered with a musical tinkling, and I pulled myself through it.

I hit the ground running, aiming for a small village in the distance. I tossed a glance over my shoulder and saw the building I took refuge in go up in flames. This happened to everything that I stayed in. Forests, buildings, towns, everything! Nothing was safe from its fiery wrath.

Reaching the town limits, I stopped and glanced around. I knew that the monster loved looking at the fires it creates, so I was safe for a couple of hours. I took note of the mainly wooden structures and the small shops in the town. It would love to burn this place down. I heard the sounds of drunken singing coming from a building labeled *Bar* to my right. Curious, I went in.

I was immediately assaulted by the overwhelming smell of alcohol, the stench nearly bowling me over. Under it was the scent of food. Delicious food. I hadn't eaten for a week. Saliva immediately flooded my mouth and I tugged my wallet from my pocket and looked at the money within. I found that I had just enough to buy a meal at the bar. I walked up to the bartender and ordered my food. I found an empty table and sat down. The source of the singing I heard outside of the bar was two men, one black with an eye patch and the other with an oversized helmet on his head. They were surrounded by seven other men, varying in their ethnicity. They were all wearing blue and had a logo sewn onto their clothes. B.L.U: Builders League United. I never heard of it so I shrugged and turned to the barmaid, carrying my food.

"Here it is ma'am." The waitress gave me a cheery smile, but I ignored her and peered out of the window. Satisfied that my pursuer wasn't there, I dug in. I inhaled my food, tasting meat and potatoes. I heard a impressed whistle from across the bar.

"Wow. Hungry much girly?" I looked up and saw a rather skinny man, almost a teen really, look at me from the groups with the drunk singing people. I glared at him and turned back to my food.

"Hey! I'm talking to you!" I heard angry footsteps coming towards me and the singing stop. I looked up and saw the skinny guy walking towards me, an outraged expression on his face. "Do you know who I am?"

"Should I?" I answered, still sitting.

"Babe. You don't know what you got yourself into." He finally reached my table and swept the food off the table. I looked at the mess on the floor and got up.

"I was gonna eat that."

"So what? You gonna cry now?" He taunted. I swiftly brought my knee up and buried it in his stomach. He grabbed his middle and staggered away a little bit. He wheezed and glared at me, his eyes full of hate.

I smiled down at him, "Nope. You are." He straightened and tried to rush at me, a fist raised, but I grabbed the offending hand and tugged it up and behind his back. The knife I had was held by my other hand and place on his neck.

"You better pay for my meal." I said coldly. Grumbling, he slowly took out his wallet from his pocket with his free hand. I put my knife away and took the wallet and took out a ten dollar bill.

"Thank you." I handed his wallet back and went back to the stunned bartender.

"Sorry about the mess. May I have another plate?" He nodded mutely and headed into the kitchen. I looked at

the mess on the floor and sighed. Such a waste of food.

"Those were some interestin' moves there pardner. Scout had it comin' to him anyway. That boy needs to learn some manners." I turned and saw a short man wearing a hardhat and goggles along with a mechanics overalls, a wrench tucked into his belt.

"Scout?" I asked, ignoring his odd appearance. He nodded to the fuming man that I just beat. He was being consoled by a rather lanky man wearing a pair of aviators, a vest with some bullets on it, and a slouch hat.

"Yeah. I reckon' he had too much to drink. Name's Engineer by the way. So what brings you to this neck of the woods?"

"Joan. I was just passing through." I rubbed my arm nervously.

"Now it's not nice to lie. I know a hunted man when I see one."

"I'm not a man."

"Hunted man. Woman. 'Bout the same thing." I sigh, having been caught, and told him about my pursuer.

"Fine. It's been following me for a month now. It burned down my house and wears this weird red rubber suit and a gas mask." He looked at me, his eyes wide and jaw dropped.

"That *thing* has been following you for a month?"

"You know it?"

"It's part of our rival company. Reliable Excavation Demolition, R.E.D. for short. They're mercenaries trying to sabotage B.L.U., but we were employed to stop them and perform counter-sabotage. This one, we call it a Pyro, just got recently employed and it's a hard bugger to beat."

"It's been burning everything in its path to get to me. I don't know why." Engineer grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me closer.

"Think." I scanned my memories to find the reason. I gasped and opened my eyes when I found something.

"I remember seeing this meeting between a lady in purple and some man that I couldn't see. The woman noticed me and looked ready to kill me, so I left. I was just cleaning the bathrooms in the stadium like my boss told me. I didn't mean to."

"You saw the Administrator?"

"The who?"

"Nothing."

I frowned, but let it go, "And that's it. That Pyro or whatever showed up that night."

"Well ah'm at least gonna try to help." He turned towards his comrades, his wrench already in his hand. "We need to protect this girl."

"I'm not a girl. I'm twenty one." Scout shot a glare at me and looked at Engineer.

"Why would I help her?" He puffed out his chest.

"Because the Pyro is coming for her and you know it won't stop until she's dead." Scout's chest immediately deflated and he had a look of horror plastered on his face.

"The Pyro's coming here? Like right now? We don't even have our weapons!"

"It don't matter. This girl is now protected by B.L.U. Mercenaries. We will at least buy her time." I looked at Scout and, despite his terror, he had a look of resolve on his face. I looked at the other mercenaries, the two drunks now completely sober, and saw the same.

"Thanks. I owe you -" I froze as I heard the frighteningly familiar breathing coming from outside the door. I felt a heavy hand and was picked up and placed behind the bar by the helmeted B.L.U. that was singing with the eye patch wearing one. He pointed at the door leading outside.

"Go go go!" He whispered, shoving me towards the entrance.

"What about y-" I was cut off again as the Pyro kicked open the small door and walked inside, a flamethrower

held at the ready. I dropped and crawled towards the door, the sounds of fighting starting behind me.

I sprinted out of the bar and turned out of the alleyway I was let out on. I already saw the first flames flicker in the bar and I hoped that the mercenaries would make it out fine. I spotted an abandoned barn a little bit out of the town limits and decided to make my way there. I ran towards the barn and saw that it was made of wood. Great.

I kicked open the doors and made my way inside, the dim lighting making me squint. I searched the little rooms that were there. I found a room riddled with holes and saw a fresh corpse propped up against the wall, holding a shotgun. I immediately spotted the weapon and tugged it out of his hands, finding some shells for the gun in his pockets. I climbed up a ladder and made my way up to a small loft filled with hay. My plan was to wait there and blow the Pyro to bits. I looked out a small hole overlooking the town and saw that it was already in flames, a small figure collapsing on it's main street. I briefly hoped that it was the Pyro, but it was crushed as I saw its figure coming down the road towards me. I turned back to the doors and got my shotgun ready.

After a couple of minutes I heard its footsteps outside. I heard a creak come down from under me.

There was a door beneath me?! I mentally screamed and waited for the Pyro to wander into my sights. I was rewarded with a masked head popping out from the room beneath me, followed by a rubber body. I aimed my shotgun and fired.

The Pyro seemed to hear me and managed to dodge with a muffled cry of surprise. It whirled around and pulled a flare gun from his belt, but I was already on the move, leaping out of the loft as the flare set it on fire. I rolled to lessen the impact of me leaping from the loft to the floor and I came up with my shotgun pointed in his face, its flare gun in mine. We both stared at each other, the Pyro with his head cocked. I brought up my knee and kicked the flare gun out of its hand and moving my shotgun barrel in the process. I tried to get my shotgun up, but the Pyro brought one of his hands down on it, knocking it out of my loose grip. I lunged to the side as the Pyro tried to punch me and ran into another room. I found a fire axe lying in some hay and grabbed it, spinning and bringing it up just in time to block the Pyro's own axe. Both of us struggled for a bit until I kicked the Pyro again, this time in the stomach. I tried to hit it with the axe, but a burning beam fell between us. Seeing an opportunity to get away, the Pyro stood up and ran out of the barn. I tried to get past the beam, but some rubble fell on me. The last thing I saw was a purple blob approach me.

I woke to the beeping of a monitor beside my hospital bed. I opened my eyes with a groan and scanned my surroundings. I was greeted with the sight of lollipops sprouting from everywhere and the walls tinged pink.

"What?" or at least that's what I tried to say. It came out more like: "Urgh." I heard a door opened and I turned my head. I was greeted by the sight of a woman wearing purple.

"Joan. I'm offering you a job at B.L.U. The worthless mercenaries need their own Pyro or else they'll be killed by the end of the week." I cocked my head to the side, confused by the odd woman.

"What's with the lollipop's?"

"Ah. It seems that the side effects of the medicine we used on you are in effect. I'm. Offering. You. A. Job." She said slowly. I gave a slow nod, trying to convey my understanding. She took a rubber gas mask from the bag she was carrying and tossed it on my bed. I stared at it and decided to put it on. I liked the feel of it and started to hum happily.

"Um... I'll take that as a yes. As soon as you are ready to leave I'll send a car for you." With that said, she got up, placed a small lighter on the nightstand beside my bed, and walked out of the door.

I stared at the door for a second, before turning to the nightstand. I found the small lighter laying on it. Grabbing it, I flicked it on.

A burst of rainbows erupted from the tip and I started to clap my hands happily. Unfortunately, the rainbow stream got cut off when I clapped. I felt depressed for a few seconds, but quickly picked it up and scanned the room for something the beautiful rainbows could live on. My gaze latched on to the curtains framing the window.

I rolled off of my bed and plodded to the window before flicked the lighter on. I held it next to the curtain and waited. After a second the rainbows leaped to the curtain in a burst of sparkles. Feeling satisfied, I turned towards the door and noticed a blue, full body, rubber suit. Leaning next to the door was what looked like a golden instrument of

some sort. I found a trigger on it and a huge burst of rainbows flooded from the tip when I pressed it. Giggling, I pulled on the suit and the backpack that came with the golden thing and shrugged it on.

Opening the door, I was greeted by the sight of people singing and skipping along their way. One passed near me and, on a whim, I bathed him in the rainbows. Beautiful laughter followed and I clapped again. I turned back to the room and flooded it with rainbows.

A blue rubber clad figure walked out of the burning hospital, humming a happy tune, and found a dark suited man holding a sign that said Pyro. Walking up to the man, it got into the car and they drove off.



Ink Dreams

Miranda Flori

Where Does Perfection Lie?

Claudia Yllanes

Where does perfection lie?

In the beginning?

On the blank slate

the moment before you touch

graphite to paper,

before you drag that line of coloured pixels across the screen,

before you hit that first key,

or sound out the first note?

In the middle?

as rubber lifts the stray marks away,

as line after line is reassessed and redesigned,

as your work comes to radiant life

before your very eyes?

Or at the end,

after all the lines are made concrete,

after the voids are filled

with your innermost secrets,

and those *others* who know not have

seen,

heard,

judged?

Please,

Tell me,

where,

does perfection whisper its,

Beautiful,

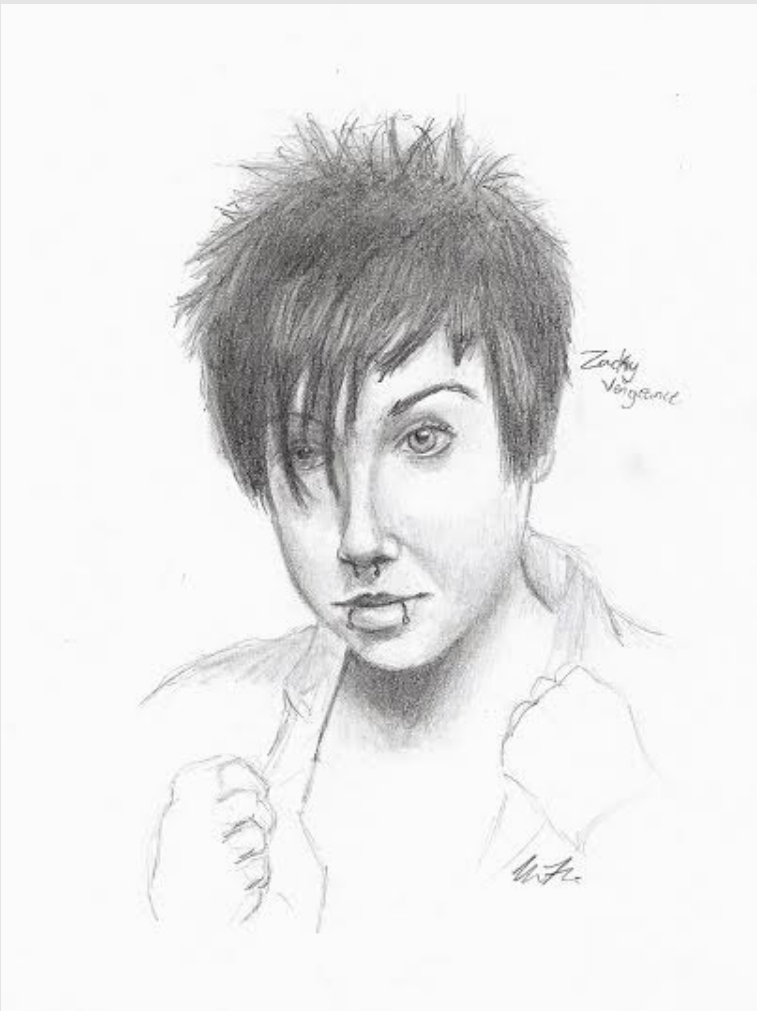
Tragic,

Lie?

Poppy Painting

Miranda Flori





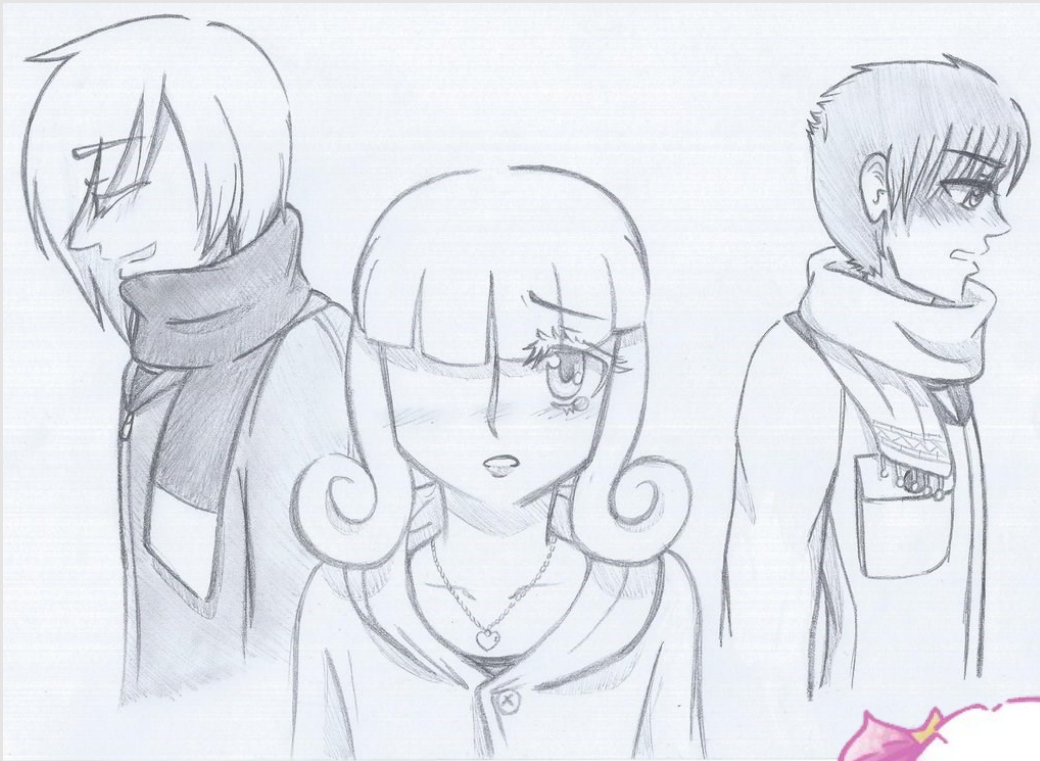
Vengeance

Miranda Flori



Wise Mr. Cat

Jordyn LaRocca



Two Roads

Jordyn LaRocca



Isis Kiss

Jordyn LaRocca

Help

Miranda Flori

Clouds drop black rain
It isn't even true
I can't stop the pain
We leave that up to you

Sureshine glows upon your apocalypse
But what is not wanted, can't be seen
Clairvoyant vision shows me the end
When self mutilation blackens our hearts

Cutting down the trees of hope
Pleading for eyes to see your crimson
Our helping hands aren't enough
We need your strength, to save you

Don't want to water the poisonous flower
But the aroma it submits draws you near
Look at the one casting the shadows you follow
Don't be exasperated when you catch your reflection
You've been blinded by your own deceit

You are the boy who cried death
'And ran when he came
But that's all you wanted
It's all part of your game
Now we see you as you really are
As everyone tears away

I saw it ending a different way
Peace only lays in my mind
Maybe when it's too late
You'll see what could've been done
There was light when you saw dark
You just had to open your eyes

I Can't Fly

Miranda Flori



New Year's Promise

Jordyn LaRocca



Trickster Xanthe

Samantha Barrows

Raise Your Hand

Jordyn LaRocca

Please, play along and pretend to pay attention to my precious and petty poetry.

I think things have been throwing themselves away, through the thickets, and away from me.

I come crawling back home, comforting computer cooing with cool, considerate comrades,

And I wish I wasn't so wimpy to whine about life and worry while wonders whirl whimsical winds around me, not wise enough to watch.

I've been drifting through dreams of driving through the drudgery of a dreadful surrounding of drugs and drama from a dropping, dreary society.

I can't handle happiness happily when home becomes hate, and hate becomes horrifying, and horror is multiplying while I helplessly hate how here's heroes have huge egos, and hold my head tightly, hesitantly holding the handle of hysterical doom while handing half a hurt heart to those whose hearts are heavy.

Something seems selfless about my supplying of sympathy to sappy students of a silly life. Sadly, 'selfless' is simply a subterfuge of something some like to say I solely am. Sincerely, I am sour and sorrowful, and surely, someone sees my scheme of sloppy scribbles of sayings, since it seems so unsubtle to me.

May many have mercy on me, who has mangled the mere makings of the miraculous mazes of an unmanageable, mangy melancholy of a moderately morbid mind that is mine?

Just judging gently on the name Jordyn, JoJo, she just jokes about general jumbles of jumpy things. When JoJo jets out of gym class, she gets jittery and you josh that she's joyful.

Finally, friends feel she's free from feverish feelings as she fronts, "I'm fine" but her friends don't focus on the fact that she's fuzzy in her few phrases, but they feel fine knowing she's no longer fretting of frustrated feelings and filling their full conversations with talk of frowns. Despite the fact that her 'fine' is phony, she continues to feel like feelings are forbidden to speak of when with said friends, and she furthers her fooling of friends by faking her feelings to allow them to forget her frowns and follow their own fantastic lives, her flaws spreading freakishly fast like wild fire through her foul mind.

Lovely lies look life in its eyes, and laugh while loners who use them lose their liability and loyalty to a once locked longing of a life without lies or disguise.

Becoming buried by bones of beaten corpses of boasts once made by the bold and brave you. Basically, you bullied your body to bits while big groups of bodies bend over backwards to build you back up before you break yourself once again.

Now, numerous nation, notify that you acknowledge my insanity by raising your hand.

why you keep the old, ragged towels

Jordyn LaRocca

today, i learned why you keep the old towels that hide in the back of the closet, torn up and stained.
because, one day, your neighbor gets a kitten that fits in your hand.
immediately, you're going to fall in love with that kitten, and cherish its life- half because of how cute it is
and half because your mother won't let you own your own cat.
the kitten's back paws are missing, but he's still troublesome and reckless.
you let the kitten attack your hands, making you bleed because you love him, and you're seriously fascinated
by his ferocity and strength, disregarding his handicap.
you visit the kitten every now and then, and you love the kitten every time, and you always offer to look after
him when your neighbor is gone.
you grow attached to the kitten, and something tells you that the kitten grows attached to you, too.
the kitten's small, and he's full of fleas, but he's too young for anyone to do something about it.
they run in and out of his ears, and he acts like they're just an extension of him, but you know it's not right,
and you pity the poor soul.
it comes time for him to get his first flea treatment, and you feel hope stirring within you.
but the flea treatment doesn't work.
and, whether it's because of the fleas or the odd circulation in his back legs or the bug spray in the house or
he ate the cat litter or he fell too far,
your dad comes into your room, before you start your homework, and he tells you that the kitten died.
you feel upset for a second,
maybe two,
but you rethink it and tell yourself that being upset is useless, and death is all around,
so there's nothing to freak out about.
you seem pretty desensitized, and your sister, also attached to the cat, is almost surprised by your lack of
emotion toward the kitten's death.
you explain the logic in life and death and how the kitten 'wouldn't want us to dwell on it'.
then, your neighbor invites you over to bury the cat.
you're reluctant, but your sister persists, and you tag along for the cat burial, bringing along some salty crack-
ers.
when you get there, your neighbor is crying, and she's holding the wrapped up kitten.
she says, "it's almost like he's sleeping" and whimpers a bit.
you eat a salty cracker.
she takes the keys for the shed, sets the kitten down on a christmas box, and leaves to get the shovel.
then, you're left with your sister to look at the dead kitten.
he really looks like he's asleep.
you eat a salty cracker.
that's when you see that he's wrapped up in an old towel.
that's what old towels are used for.
because you might need them to wrap up your dead pet someday
and put it in the ground.
it seemed like an epiphany, but it was certainly a rather morbid one.
you eat a salty cracker.
after a while and a little discussion between you and your sister,
you stick a salty cracker in your mouth, and you finally decide to take the last picture of the kitten
that you'll ever take.

it's probably rude, but

you had already planned on taking pictures of its course throughout life.

it just so happened that it ended earlier than expected.

you set your phone away, and

you eat a salty cracker.

this whole time, you realize that you've been petting the kitten,

but it's sort of useless beyond this point.

still, you scold the fleas and crush them with your fingers everytime

they threaten to crawl into his eyes and mouth

because they don't belong there,

and they never belonged on him.

your sister picks up a limb and drops it,

proving he's dead.

still, you check its pulse.

you almost swear that you heard him make a grunt of some sort,

but that's a little too ridiculous.

there is no pulse.

just fleas.

you eat another salty cracker.

you and your sister might unwrap the towel a bit and see the rest of his body,

but you wrap him back up after a few moments.

in a moment, your neighbor comes back with the shovel,

but she has to secure the kitten first,

so nothing digs him up,

and eats him.

like the fleas did.

you place another salty cracker into your mouth.

she takes out a plastic, garbage bag, and she slides the wrapped up kitten into the bag.

you try to continue chewing.

you try really, really hard.

you even shove the rest of the cracker into your mouth,

thinking that you can swallow it if you do so,

but you can't.

and you cry.

you cover your mouth

and you painfully swallow the cracker,

and you just can't stand the sight of a cute

lovable

playful

kitten

being shoved into a plastic bag.

your neighbor notices, despite the fact you're making sure to stay silent,

and she hugs you, saying that she knows, and she cries with you.

your sister is shocked, and she pets your back

and you let out one or two noises of uncontrolled breathing,

but other than that,

you're trying not to breath at all

the salty crackers may have dried all of the saliva in your mouth,
but they failed to dry your tears,
and you try to be as quiet as possible,
but there are too many things wrong with a kitten being shoved into a plastic bag.
too many.
and you couldn't hold a stone-heart about this anymore.
then, your neighbor will leave to bury the kitten,
and you'll be left, in awkward silence, with your sister,
before you work up the nerve to tell her, "It's just weird seeing a kitten being put in a garbage bag, ya know?"
where her only response is, "Yeah..."
after a moment, you calm yourself, and your neighbor thanks you both for coming.
you tell her thank you, and you tell her that you'll see her later.
you feel bad that you didn't hug her back
or comfort her
because it's her cat that's dead
and not yours,
but that's not really the dominate thought in your head
as your sister drives,
down the street,
for a minute,
in silence.
you reach your house,
and your dad asks you if you feel better,
and you give an emotionless, "More or less."
while you walk up the stairs,
but you can't help but to drop the last, three
salty crackers on the ground,
and cry harder,
when your own cat greets you at your bedroom
door.

So, I decided that I would write about this when
I got home.
I decided that I should share my knowledge with
you...
And tell you why, exactly, we keep those old
towels in our closets.

Jordyn LaRocca



A New Reality: Chapter One- What The?

Matthew Beese

It is an early December morning and the sun is just about to rise. I was just waking up when “Buzz Buzz Buzz” as my alarm rang throughout my room. The sound began bouncing off of everything in my room. Then I finally hit the snooze button and silence returned and all I heard was my own breathing. Slowly, I got up and waited to hear anything more, but there was nothing. So I started to get dressed slowly, still listening for any sounds that may sound out of place.

Finally I was dressed and quietly made my way out of the hallway, having my room at the end of it. As I made my way across the living room to make it to the kitchen I tripped on the TV remote. I basically face planted the carpet and it was loud and painful. But in that moment I heard it. The sound of someone waking up and coming to see what the noise was. The sound was getting closer so I dove into the kitchen and behind the counter.

“James is that you?” said my mom

Nothing.

“I told you that you can't be outside this early in the morning. Your only 14 and still don't understand.” she repeated.

I have had this conversation with my mom over and over about how I can't go out early in the morning on weekends. The reasons varies all the time one time she said “The wolves or bears will get you” or “You might fall and get hurt.” I had told her that I would always be fine and carry a two way walkie talkie that my dad use while working in the woods nearby during his free time.

So I quietly made my way out of the kitchen without her noticing until I grabbed the walkie talkie and ran out the door. As soon as I got out of sight of the house she told me through the walkie talkie that I was going to be grounded for a week and have no games. Honestly I did not care for the video games because I did not play them or even look at them. I did this because my mom wanted me to stay home and not be out here.

I know its reverse for some, but that was me out here in the woods doing whatever I please and trying everything. I did this because they did not teach anything that you would need out there in the woods or wherever I would be. So I did this to know, not because it is fun but because it would be important.

I walked for a while longer till finally I made it to my fort in the woods, it was a little octagonal shape that was half in ground and half above ground. I made it out of wood logs and mud with leaves and pine needles for roofing and camouflage. On the inside I had all the stuff I had collected like bottles, arrowheads and musket balls. Today was extra foggy so I slowly made my way when walking around so I would not fall into any holes or pits in the ground.

As I walked about the fog began to lift ever so slightly, but as it did I began to wander back to the fort because I had walked for a while. I started to think that I had gotten lost in the fog and I did not want to call for help or else I would never be let out of the house again. It was still morning when I returned to the fort except when I got there the roof had caved in which saddened me but some things don't last long. So I began to clean it out, I noticed the walls were still up it was the roof just fell apart, so I just wanted to fix the roof. By the time I had the fort cleaned out the fog had lifted and the sun began to shine through to the ground. This was my favorite part of the day just when the sun came through and made a these tunnels of lights that came down to take you away.

I spent the rest of the day up until dusk fixing the roof and improving it and covering it, yet not enough for it to cave in again because it had not had time to set in place. It started to get darker and I started to make my last walk around before I got grounded for tomorrow. While I was walking around in the distance there was a faint light I thought *that can't be my dad or mom so what is causing that blue light*. I had already walked a whole lot farther than I usually did so I just went towards it and did it fast because sleeping in the fort was not comfortable and beds are nicer. I briskly walked over to the source of the light and the light was

hard to look at because I felt like I was staring at the sun. But gradually I got closer and soon it began to dim and get softer on the intensity of lighting and finally it was like a ball of neon lighting. I slowly got as close as I dared and stared at it a little longer and it appeared to be a little blue glowing ball and just that sitting on the ground. So I slowly made my way closer looking for any traps but there were none just a blue ball on the ground. I picked it up and put it in my pocket and dashed all the way back to the fort so I would not get stuck in the woods but the sun had set and darkness rose from that. I was forced into staying the night at the fort but I did have a light but even this dim ball could not cut through the night around me. When I looked out one of the entry ways to close up the darkness was so much I put my hand in front of me and was not able to see it. On that note I decided that I needed to close tight so nothing except air could get in. I set the orb in the middle of the room and I curled up in the corner that all the pine needles from earlier that I put there so that way I could relax in the fort but it became my bed that night. Throughout the night I could hardly sleep and I constantly woke up to the pine needles poking into my skin. One time I woke up and found that the light was brighter than before but I ignored it and right as I was about to fall asleep again when the light grew brighter than before and a loud screeching started.

Then everything was white and empty like there was nothing there, only white. For a moment I thought I was insane but actually I figured that the light and screeching was so overpowering that I couldn't hear or see. Then all of a sudden there was a faint call of someone it was so faint I could not tell if it was man or woman. I started to be able to see again and I saw a beautiful lady standing over me trying to get me to respond but all I heard was a faint strange speaking that I thought was "Are You Okay" which even that was hard to tell. Then the surrounding began to come to view and I saw these trees that tangled around each other and the leaves were this glowing green. I noticed that this lady trying to wake me up had pointed ears and sculpted features. I felt like I could do something, before that I felt restrained and unable to move. I just tried to take a breath because I felt like I wasn't so I took a deep breath and relaxed. The lady looked at me again but this time with less concern. Slowly the feeling in my hands returned, then in my feet, then I could complete feeling in the rest of my body. I look around only with my eyes again. Still nothing had changed and the same lady was still trying to get me to respond. She was still speaking in this strange language that I could not understand and I just sat up and looked around again.

Then right as I was about to stand up she pushed me back down and kept talking in a weird language. I asked "Why can't I get up and what language are you talking in?"

"Oh, you speak in informal. That is why you were so confused, but you don't look like an elf." she said so I responded "What do you mean informal, also what do you mean elf?"

"What do you mean? You don't know what an elf is. Do you at least know where you are?"

"No, in fact where am I?"

"You're coming with me you're going to need a doctor."

"But, where am I and what the heck is wrong with the trees, I mean the leaves are glowing."

"That is normal around here. Are you sure you're okay I think you seriously need a doctor."

"Okay but you need to promise me that nothing bad will come of me please."

"That is a promise I will keep with you... What is your name?"

"James."

"Well, James come with me."

We began to walk down this path that was nearby, I looked back and saw that the tree I was lying next to had a little clear blue pond next to. I continued walking trying to keep track so I could find my way back to the spot.

THE RUINED

Unkown

Shall we look at the sky, and admire it? Yea, see what God hath done for the. The glittering stars glisten, as they danced upon the ebon sky. The icy wind cuts our skin as we walk through the night. For the twilight is deserted, and it is only you and I.

In thy eyes, I can only see the stars reflection.
-- I'm clueless, my mind goes blank. thouest beam into the heavens; As if, something was spectacular. Desirous, I do too. Stuck in the moment is what we were indeed. Confused on what he saw, I glanced back at him; gone. Darkness filled everywhere.

White light, anew as one; unto an unknown place, taketh first my start. Figures whom give strange love and affection. Yea, they spoiled me, with hugs & kisses and worldly presents. But, surely I do not complain. For my mind hungereth, on what happen earlier on. Wherefore, I couldn't recall anything. -- As if my memory had been erased.

Chaos; Insane; vogler is this place. What have I gotten into?

Ashely Mullikin



A New Reality: Chapter Two- New People, New Places

Matthew Beese

I walked with her through the woods or what seemed to be woods. Where am I, what is going on, is this a dream? These were the thoughts that danced through my head and was starting to shake in reality. Finally I realized that this must be real this could not be a dream, dreams are not this detailed. I tried to keep focus on one thing at a time because this was just too much for me to take in at one moment so I tried to focus on the path and how the dirt looked. It didn't look that different, but it had this red tint and bits and pieces of nearby tree bark. I started to stare off into the distance and think will my parents know where to look for me? How will they react to me missing? How far is this doctor that she is taking me to? My thoughts stopped as I noticed that the trail turned into a smooth cobbled path. I looked up and stood in awe of this beautiful houses that were hand crafted with the highest of attention to detail. These houses were octagonal shaped and some sat higher than others on stilts, the stilts were the trunks of trees with boards pierced through them. It was so amazing how they just cut a hole in the tree and placed a beam so the tree was still living.

I did not see any others that looked like this lady as we got closer. I followed her around the houses and we came to the foot of a hill with the same little wooden houses except they sat in the hill. The lady knocked on the door and waited, I took the opportunity to ask "What is your name?" She paused as if I had asked her something that should never be spoken of. She turned to me and said "My name is Evelin Treekin."

I responded, "It nice to meet you Evelin Treekin."

"It is nice to meet you too James" she replied. As she finished her sentence another elf answers the door and lets us in. The room was a fourth of an octagon with panel like walls constructed out of wood and the floor was plain stone. There was tables and chairs made from watertight wood and covered in cloth. There was only a handful of other elves in there they all looked different and sick. Just sick.

The elf that let us in lead us to a room, the elf was a girl, and said something to Evelin Treekin. Then she was off just like that here then gone. Another elf entered, a man he stood tall and thin he wore a mask and handed one to Evelin Treekin. It made me feel like I was infected or contagious to them I wanted to go home back to my fort and parents and a nice warm bed. This elf that seemed to be a doctor came up to me looking at me curiously like a new species and well maybe I was I really did not know.

He made me do some exercises and a couple things that my normal doctor would ask like "Open up and say aaahh" and he checked my eyes. For some reason he seemed to be more amazed as we went on as if I was the new generation of humans or something. But eventually I started to think that maybe I was the first to set foot here. Then it clicked I was in this new place that which nothing that I knew was here it was new to me but not to them.

Finally I think that he finished and he looked at Evelin Treekin and seemed to whisper something then her eyes lit up. "He says that you are completely fine but ..." she said

"But what, what are you all not telling me?" I questioned

"We have not seen anything like you before."

"So what are going to do... dissect me to find out what I am it's not that hard to know what I am, I am only HUMAN." I yelled. I hadn't even realized that I was yelling and when I noticed it was too late I might have just doomed myself.

"No, No we are not going to do such a thing as promised no harm will come of you but we would like you to stay a few day just in case you are not okay."

Or not. Should I stay? Is this all a trick or is she being sincere?

"Well I guess but only because I don't have anywhere to go."

"Good let me take you to where you will be staying."

We walked out the door with that doctor still watching me which freaked me out a lot. When we got outside there was still no one outside. This city was just vacant and empty of any other elves. It was getting darker out, by now it was near sunset and we had walked all the way to the other side of the city. She led

me to this octagonal house that was in a tree with a humongous staircase out front that led to the door. "You should find everything that you need for the next few days." she told me.

Then she left, every time Evelin looked at me I felt like that she couldn't comprehend what she was looking at. I looked back and she was gone, it was amazing how fast she was able to move and be out of there in no time. I walked up the steps and through the hand crafted door into a finely decorated room covered in furs and thin strips of leather weaved into mats and rugs. I went to the bedroom and laid down. My feet ached of all the distance that I had covered over the day. I finally started to relax and fall asleep.

In the middle of sleep I woke up and it was still dark out. But something moved in the dark. I went towards it and it was just a shadow being cast by something. The shadow looked like a snake and kind of mimics its movement of a snake. I approached the window expecting something to be there casting a shadow. But there wasn't there was just an empty window not anywhere close to a tree or anything. Then I realized that something was wrong, I realized that I had crawled over to the window and had barely saw out of the window. Then I quickly creep all the way across the room to the mirror to find out what was wrong. As I did I the clicking of claws on hard wood just as if a dog was running or trotting around on a dining room table. But I dismissed that and needed to see what happened to me. Then I finally reached the mirror and looked into it deeply trying to see myself. But instead of seeing me in the mirror I saw this man size dragon in the reflection. I was startled and staggered backwards onto my back. In that moment I look back at the mirror just to see the same dragon with ruby haze. For A moment I thought, *Is that me?*

Ashley Mullikin

